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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Secretary Rice to Israel, West Bank November 13-15,

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Key stories in the media:

The Israeli dailies' top stories were split between developments in Israeli politics (Ha'aretz, Yediot, and The Jerusalem Post) and Knesset Member Omri Sharon's expected guilty plea (Maariv and Hatzofe).

Leading media reported that Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice postponed her departure Monday night to work out negotiations with Israel and the Palestinian Authority on the contentious issue of the Rafah border crossing between Gaza and Egypt. (Yediot headlined: "Rafah Crossing: The Ultimatum.") The Jerusalem Post wrote: "That she delayed her departure to Korea to get personally involved in the issue was an indication of just how important she considered it." This morning, Israel Radio reported that Rice cancelled her trip to South Korea. The Jerusalem Post quoted Secretary Rice as saying Monday: "A lot of these are

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highly technical issues. I believe that with will and some creativity, and agreement to what the envoy [James Wolfensohn] has proposed ... as a way forward should be within sight."

Israel Radio reported that a draft agreement regarding crossings and movement of goods and people, which the U.S. conveyed to Israel, states that Palestinian customs officials will be posted at the Kerem Shalom crossing and supervised by Israeli customs officials; a media room would be set up at the Rafah border crossing, as video footage would be inspected by Israeli and Palestinian officials. Should differences arise, European monitors would have the final say. The sides reportedly agreed that work would begin on the Gaza seaport and the planning of a Gaza airport. Passage between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank would be carried out in the manner proposed by Wolfensohn -- by buses and trucks. Israel Radio quoted diplomatic sources in Jerusalem as saying that the Americans would like an agreement to be signed today. Ha'aretz quoted a senior GOI source as saying that he expects the agreement on the issue to be signed today. Various commentators, notably on Channel 2-TV and Israel Radio, said that the Americans are giving the impression that the current developments in Israeli politics are shortening the diplomatic calendar. This morning, Israel Radio reported that an agreement was reached, following a meeting between Secretary Rice, Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz, and Shin Bet head Yuval Diskin. The radio reported that Secretary Rice announced that the Rafah crossing would open on November 25 for pedestrian traffic. The station quoted Mofaz as saying

that the role that Egypt played in reaching an agreement could be a basis for the future. The radio reported that Yuval Steinitz, the chairman of the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, urged the government to reject pressure to sign the agreement in its present form.

Leading media quoted Secretary Rice as saying Monday at a news conference in Ramallah that she expects Israel to fulfill its obligations to put a halt to settlement expansion and evacuate illegal outposts. The media reported that Rice told PA officials, including PA Chairman [President] Mahmoud Abbas as saying that the settlements are contrary to U.S. policy, which opposes any steps likely to prejudice final-status agreements. Ha'aretz quoted Secretary Rice as saying: "It is very important for ordinary Palestinians ... that there be freedom of movement between Gaza and the West Bank." Hatzofe reported that Secretary Rice has "adopted the Palestinian position" by demanding that Sharon agree to Hamas's participation in the PA's legislative elections.

Ha'aretz quoted Secretary Rice as saying Monday in Jerusalem that Israel will be included in American efforts to advance democracy in the Middle East. Ha'aretz reported that Rice told FM Silvan Shalom: "There is room to include Israel, and I told Arab leaders that." Ha'aretz reported that Secretary Rice praised FM Shalom's efforts to advance Israel's relations with the Arab states, and quoted her as saying that she expects to hear soon about further breakthroughs.

The media reported that Labor Party Chairman Knesset Member Amir Peretz forced his party's ministers and deputy ministers to sign resignation letters on Monday. Leading media say that the move was intended to forestall a possible decision by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to fire the ministers and to prevent Sharon from dividing them by negotiations with those who want to remain in the government. Leading media cited increasing criticism of Peretz's moves among Labor ministers and his Likud rivals, but also from close associates. The media wrote that Knesset elections are likely to be held in March 2006.

All media reported that today, FM Shalom will start a visit to Tunisia, his native country.

The media reported that on Monday, during the inauguration of the Rabin Center for Israel Studies in Tel Aviv, Sharon stressed his personal connection with the late PM Yitzhak Rabin, but downplayed the Oslo Accords. The media reported that during the special Knesset session in Rabin's memory, Knesset Speaker Reuven Rivlin (Likud) offended several Knesset members with claims that politicians were still trying to make political gains from Rabin's assassination.

The media continued to report on the visit to Israel of former U.S. President Bill Clinton and U.S. Senator Hillary Clinton.

All media reported that lawyers of Likud Knesset Member Omri Sharon, the PM's son, will announce today that their client plans to retire from politics after reaching a plea bargain over charges related to his father's 1999 primaries campaign.

The media reported that on Monday morning, IDF troops killed Amjad Hinawi, Hamas's top commander in the northern West Bank. The Jerusalem Post notes that Hinawi shot and murdered David Boim, an American yeshiva student, in 1996. Ha'aretz reported that Hamas's military wing, Izz al-Din al-Qassam, said in a statement faxed to AP, that "the painful retaliation of al-Qassam is coming."

The Jerusalem Post reported that on Monday, after a delay of eight months, the High Court of Justice held a hearing on an appeal by the PA involving 15 lawsuits for damages caused by Palestinian terrorists during the Al-Aqsa Intifada.

Yediot, Maariv, and The Jerusalem Post reported that Israel is cooperating with Iran, Pakistan, Egypt, and the PA, in the establishment and operation of a scientific/research particle accelerator at Jordan's University of Balaka.

The media reported that during the weekend, the police interrogated Israel's Ambassador to the UK, Zvi Hefetz, under suspicion of money laundering related to his business relations with Russian tycoon and Maariv newspaper shareholder Vladimir Gusinsky.

Ha'aretz reported that Israel is trying to persuade Jewish federations and communities in the U.S. to finance Israeli aid programs in foreign countries.

Israel Radio reported that today, the state sold a controlling stake in Bank Leumi, the country's second largest bank, to U.S. equity investment fund Cerbus Gabriel for 2.474 billion shekels (around USD 522 million).

The Jerusalem Post reported on the fight by the Israeli music group Coolooloosh's American lead singer, Joel Covington, against the Interior Ministry's decision to deport him from the country because he has stayed illegally in Israel for much of the past six years. The newspaper reported that more than 275 supporters have signed a petition on his behalf.

Secretary Rice to Israel, West Bank, November 13-15,

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Summary:

Senior columnist Dan Margalit wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv: "Wolfensohn was immediately accused of being Abu Mazen's assistant."

Veteran columnist Yaron London wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "The most prevalent protest [in the Arab world] was over the fact that Muslims had dared to murder Muslims, and not that innocent people had been killed. The implication of this is frighteningly clear: terror in and of itself is not an act to be condemned."

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "Labor Party members must understand, prior to the unstoppable decision toward which [newly elected Labor Party Chairman Amir] Peretz is leading the way, that all these attempts are at odds with decent politics. Worse yet, a significant danger to democracy in Israel lies concealed. Let Peretz carry on with his labors."

Block Quotes:

I. "Gaza-Style Economics"

Senior columnist Dan Margalit wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv (November 15): "Who would have thought that ... [Quartet special envoy] Jim Wolfensohn would have delivered a reproof speech ... about Israel's responsibility for developments in distant Gaza's economy? This happened during an Israeli-American dialogue at the Saban Forum.... Wolfensohn was immediately accused of being Abu Mazen's assistant.... What Israel can do is to send a certain amount of money to Gaza, behind the backs of the terror organizations, and not through the corrupt PA institutions.... If, by means of force and threats, the PA and Hamas prevent Gazans from receiving their money, Israel will at least enjoy good will and create initial frictions between destitute [Gaza] residents and the Palestinian leadership. This is already something."

II. "The Arab Version of the Amman Terror Attacks"

Veteran columnist Yaron London wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (November 13): "About half of those killed in the Amman terror attacks were Palestinian Jordanian citizens and Palestinians from the West Bank.... I hoped that the blind murderousness that had hit them would arouse in the Palestinians questions about the justice of suicide bombing attacks, but this hope was dashed.... The most prevalent protest [in the Arab world] was over the fact that Muslims had dared to murder Muslims, and not that innocent people had been killed. The implication of this is frighteningly clear: terror in and of itself is not an act to be condemned. The mistake has to do with the religious identity of the victims.... This denial is that of the masses and of the intellectuals. The contention that it is impossible that Muslims would commit such a heinous act and therefore those who did it were not Muslims, was understood by the masses of Jordanians in its simplest meaning: if Muslims didn't do it, then obviously others did, and these others are those who aspire to weaken the Arabs, in other words -- the Jews.... The [West Bank] villagers are incapable of containing the thought that the mentality motivating

the shahids that come from their midst is the same that motivates the suicide bombers sent by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi to murder their relatives. You don't need to be a psychologist to realize that admitting this would lead them to the mouth of a dark pit, where the awful realization resides that those who committed the murder in Amman are not 'the others,' 'the Israelis,' 'the Zionists,' 'America,' the CIA, but rather the victims, in other words, the deniers themselves.'"

III. "Let Peretz Carry On With His Labors"

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (November 15): "[Newly elected Labor Party Chairman Amir] Peretz angers his rivals because he plans to stand by the explicit promise he made to his voters: to quit the government and reestablish the Labor Party as a staunchly dovish, social-democratic opposition offering a clear and unequivocal alternative to the current right-wing government. Labor ministers, who have become used to the pleasantness of power, apparently hope to dissolve this commitment and defer it as long as possible to gain time and weaken Peretz. Labor Party members must understand, prior to the unstoppable decision toward which Peretz is leading the way, that all these attempts are at odds with decent politics. Worse yet, a significant danger to democracy in Israel lies concealed. Let Peretz carry on with his labors."

JONES